

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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USIA-06 SAM-01 SSM-03 OMB-01 IO-13 ACDA-07 /094 W

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R 231621Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1570

INFO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 7041

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, LE, SY

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH GHASSAN TUEINI

REF: (A) BEIRUT 6357, (B) BEIRUT 6361, (C) BEIRUT 6988

1. SUMMARY. DURING A CALL BY EMBOFFS ON AUG 20, GHASSAN TUEINI DISCUSSED DIVISION OF BEIRUT, DESCRIBED A LEBANON DOMINATED BY A MARONITE "NATION" AND EXPRESSED SKEPTICISM ABOUT THE CONSPIRACY THEORY INVOLVING THE U.S. END SUMMARY

2. SITUATION IN BEIRUT. CHARGE HUNT, ACCOMPANIED BY EMBOFF LANE, CALLED ON GHASSAN TUEINI, MINISTER OF LABOR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS, AND PUBLISHER OF TWO BEIRUT NEWSPAPERS, ON AUG 20. TUEINI SAID HE HAD JUST CROSSED CONFRONTATION LINE IN BEIRUT (HE REFERRED TO IT AS THE "MANDELBAUM GATE"), AS HE HAD BEEN DOING TWICE A WEEK FOR MANY WEEKS. THIS TIME, HOWEVER, IT HAD BEEN MORE DIFFICULT. GUARD AT ROAD BLOCK ON WEST SIDE HAD THREATENED TO SHOOT HIM (HE DIDN'T). TUEINI REMARKED THAT BEIRUT BECOMING TWO CITIES, AND ATMOSPHERE
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ON TWO SIDES WAS VERY DIFFERENT.

3. THE FUTURE OF LEBANON. ECHOING SAEB SALAM (BEIRUT 6988), TUEINI SAID DE FACTO PARTITION EXISTS: THE CHRISTIANS IN MOST OF MT. LEBANON, THE SYRIAN-OCCUPIED REGIONS OF BEKAA AND AKKAR, AND PALESTINIANS AND MOSLEM/LEFTISTS IN SOUTH LEBANON AND WEST BEIRUT. THE QUESTION IS WHAT IF ANYTHING CAN BE DONE TO REBUILD A UNIFIED LEBANON OF SOME SORT OUT OF THESE PARTS. TUEINI SAID THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A MARONITE NATION, ALTHOUGH MANY PEOPLE HAD NOT REALIZED IT. AS RESULT OF THE WAR, MARONITES HAVE BECOME A NATION IN ARMS, THEIR NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS HAS INCREASED, AND THEY ARE DETERMINED TO GOVERN THEMSELVES. HE ADMITTED THERE ARE "PARTY DIFFERENCES" BETWEEN GEMAYEL AND CHAMOUN, BUT SAID THEY AGREED ON IMPORTANT ISSUES. CHRISTIANS WERE DETERMINED TO EXPEL PALESTINIANS (NOT LEBANESE MOSLEMS) FROM UPPER METN AND FILL OUT THEIR "NATURAL FRONTIERS." PALESTINIANS WOULD PREFER TO WITHDRAW FROM MOUNTAINS BUT WERE PREPARED TO FIGHT IF JUNBLATT INSISTED BECAUSE THEY NEED JUNBLATT'S SUPPORT IN OTHER AREAS. NEW MARONITE "STATE" WOULD BE QUASI-FASCIST, HE SAID. THERE WOULD BE NO LABOR LEADERS, LEFTISTS OR LIBERALS ALLOWED FOR A LONG TIME. HE ADMITTED MARONITES HAD PLANS FOR AN ATTACK ON WEST BEIRUT, BUT DID NOT THINK THEY WOULD BE CARRIED OUT UNLESS SYRIANS INSISTED; THE MARONITES DIDN'T CARE THAT MUCH ABOUT BEIRUT.

4. TUEINI SAID IT WAS MISTAKE TO TALK OF MOSLEMS AS THOUGH THEY WERE ALL SAME--ATTITUDES OF SUNNIS, SHIITES AND DRUZE WERE VERY DIFFERENT. MANY SUNNIS WERE CITY DWELLERS. TUEINI SAID HE WAS TRYING TO KEEP LINES OPEN BETWEEN MARONITES AND SUNNIS SUCH AS SALAM AND RASHID KARAME. IF THEY WANTED TO JOIN WITH NEW MARONITE-DOMINATED AREA AND BRING THEIR PART OF BEIRUT WITH THEM, THEY WOULD BE WELCOME. HE HIMSELF HOPED THIS WOULD HAPPEN BECAUSE HE IS A BEIRUTI, WITH INTERESTS ON BOTH SIDES OF LINE. TUEINI MADE CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT MARONITES WOULD MAKE NO IMPORTANT CONCESSIONS, AND THAT HE PERSONALLY, IF FORCED TO CHOOSE, WOULD CAST HIS LOT WITH MARONITES.

5. FRANGIE AND SARKIS. REFERRING TO PRESIDENT FRANGIE'S SIXTH ANNIVERSARY SPEECH, TUEINI SAID THAT IT CONTAINED MUCH CONFIDENTIAL

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SELF-JUSTIFICATION BUT ONE INTERESTING IDEA. AS ONE OF HIS FOUR CLOSING POINTS, FRANGIE HAD PROPOSED AN APPEAL TO "A GROUP OF BROTHERLY AND FRIENDLY COUNTRIES TO HELP LEBANON IN QUESTIONS OF SECURITY, ECONOMY AND RECONSTRUCTION." HE ASKED IF U.S. WOULD BE WILLING TO SEND TROOPS TO LEBANON TO MAINTAIN A CEASEFIRE. EMBOFFS RESPONDED THAT USG HAD TRADITIONALLY AVOIDED PARTICIPATING IN TRUCE-KEEPING EFFORTS OF THIS KIND THAT HAD BEEN ORGANIZED UNDER UN AUSPICES IN

MIDDLE EAST AND CYPRUS.

6. TUEINI SAID HE THOUGHT SARKIS WOULD BECOME PRESIDENT ON SEPT 23, BUT ASKED, PRESIDENT OF WHAT? HE WOULD CERTAINLY NOT BE PRESIDENT OF ALL OF LEBANON, SINCE HE WOULD HAVE NO AUTHORITY IN MANY PARTS OF THE COUNTRY, AND LITTLE IN WAY OF GOVERNMENT MACHINERY. TUEINI SAID THAT SARKIS WOULD HAVE TO WORK VERY CLOSELY WITH SYRIANS TO DEVELOP HIS POSITION AND HE (SARKIS) KNOWS IT.

7. SYRIA IN LEBANON. TUEINI SAID HE DID NOT KNOW WHAT GOALS

OF SYRIAN POLICY IN LEBANON WERE AND WAS NOT SURE THAT ASSAD HIMSELF KNEW. IT MIGHT BE THEY COVETED THE BEKAA, A REGION THEY HAD LONG HAD AN EYE ON. IT WAS INEVITABLE BECAUSE OF GEOGRAPHY THAT SYRIA WOULD PLAY MAJOR ROLE IN LEBANON, AND HE WAS PREPARED TO ACCEPT THIS. TUEINI SAID SYRIA BELONGS TO USSR, BUT HAFIZ AL ASSAD DOES NOT.

8. THE U.S. AND THE USSR. TUEINI SAID HE DID NOT BELIEVE, LIKE SOME, THAT UNITED STATES WAS CAREFULLY MANEUVERING LEBANESE SITUATION ACCORDING TO A PREARRANGED PLAN, BUT HE COULD NOT HELP BUT THINK THAT THERE HAD BEEN SOME "UNDERSTANDINGS" BETWEEN USG AND SYRIA CONCERNING ITS ACTIONS IN LEBANON. HE RECALLED REMARK DEAN BROWN HAD MADE ABOUT U.S. WANTING TO PRESERVE LEBANON AS ONE OF THE LITTLE ISLANDS OF PEACE AND FREEDOM IN THE WORLD. HE HAD WONDERED IF THIS WAS A SIGNAL FOR A NEW, MORE ACTIVIST USG POLICY IN LEBANON, BUT HE HAD SEEN NO SIGN OF IT. MARONITES HAD ASSUMED USG WOULD SUPPORT THEM, BUT HE UNDERSTOOD, HE SAID, THAT USG HAD MANY TACTICAL AND STRATEGIC INTERESTS IN MIDDLE EAST THAT MUST BE CONSIDERED IN FORMULATING OUR POLICY. TUEINI SAID HE HAD RECENTLY NOTED NEW EMPHASIS IN CONFIDENTIAL

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SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY. THEY DID NOT WANT TO LOSE SYRIA BUT THEY WOULD NEVER LET PALESTINIANS GO DOWN THE DRAIN.

9. COMMENT. TUEINI APPEARED TO BE ACTING MUCH MORE AS SPOKESMAN FOR CHRISTIAN POINT OF VIEW THAN IN HIS CONVERSATION WITH AMBASSADOR SEELYE (REFTELS A AND B). HE SEEMS TO HAVE ACCEPTED MARONITE ARGUMENTS AND BECOME CONVINCED THAT THEY WILL ACHIEVE THEIR BASIC GOALS. ONE HAS IMPRESSION THAT HIS CONSTANT (AND WELL-PUBLICIZED) VISITS BACK AND FORTH ACROSS CONFRONTATION LINE ARE DESIGNED NOT TO REESTABLISH A REUNITED LEBANON BUT TO KEEP LINE OPEN TO SALAM AND OTHER CONSERVATIVE SUNNI LEADERS IN HOPE THAT ALL OF BEIRUT CAN BE INCLUDED IN EVOLVING MARONITE ENTITY. HUNT

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